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DRAFT MEDIUM-TERM PLAN - 1992 - 1997

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SUBPROGRAMME 25: STATISTICAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

(a) Legislative authority

1. The legislative authority for this subprogramme is derived from the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa 1980-2000 (A/S-11/14 annex), General Assembly resolution S-13/2 on the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development and the International Development Strategy for the fourth United Nations Development Decade.

(b) Objective

2. The objectives of this subprogramme are to assist African countries to strengthen and/or develop a durable infrastructure for the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of integrated demographic, social and economic statistics, to integrate environment statistics into their routine data collection activities and to collect data on special population groups such as women, children, the disabled and the aged, to assist African countries to build up statistical data required for drawing up meaningful economic and social development plans, to develop the necessary statistical capabilities to produce and use on a continuous basis statistical data in planning, monitoring and evaluating social and economic progress, to provide continuous support for developing national data processing capabilities especially by enhancing the utilization of micro-computers, to expand the availability of and improve the ease of access to national, subregional and regional data bases, and to promote the improvement of the quality, relevance, timeliness and inter-country comparability of the data being collected.

(c) Problems addressed

3. Statistical development in Africa is still unsatisfactory despite some improvement in statistical organization and production over the last two decades. Few countries have well co-ordinated plans for statistical development and even fewer for national development plans which incorporate statistical development. There is a persistent lack of trained and experienced statisticians in many African countries. A number of statistical personnel has been trained, but the statistical brain drain, especially at management level, has continued. In spite of the advent of more efficient hardware and software, the time lag between the collection of data and the publication of results is still too long. The main reason for this is the lack of statisticians with modern data processing skills and of qualified data processing specialists as well as an insufficient level of co-ordination between such specialists and

computer personnel, particularly where large quantities of data need to be processed. Wider and more efficient micro-computer applications are looked for improving the timeliness and analytical quality of statistics.

4. The scope, quality and analysis of statistics in Africa hardly meet the elementary requirements of planning and decision-making. These deficiencies may translate into enormous costs if factors behind socio-economic and environmental crises remain unknown and thus unattended. Despite an improvement in demographic data collection Africa still lags behind the other regions in the availability of detailed and timely data regarding fertility, mortality and migration especially with respect to the determinants and effects or trends in these fields. While 20 African countries have enrolled in the African Household Survey Capability Programme, it is only fully operational in 12 countries. Data pertaining to environmental problems are almost non-existent in the countries of the region. Although some environmental assessments have been carried out, most countries lack co-ordination between data users and producers as well as data collection mechanisms. Many African countries do not as yet have basic statistics on agriculture, trade, industry, energy, transport, communications, and prices. National accounts have been compiled and processed for different periods of time for nearly all countries of the region, but the basic data for compiling the accounts are limited, inadequate and in most cases very general fixed parameter models have been used to evaluate quite different activities.

(d) Strategy for the period 1992-1997

(i) The situation at the end of 1991

5. The coverage, quality and timeliness of socio-economic and environment statistics in the region will have improved as compared to the early 1980s, but they will still not be sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date to provide an adequate basis for decision-making, development planning, monitoring and evaluation. The use of statistical packages especially in the field of social sciences will have increased, though not very significantly.

6. Integrated survey programmes for the collection of basic data, in preference to ad-hoc enquiries, will have been implemented in about 14 countries. Further progress will have been made in building up national capabilities for collecting and compiling primary as well as derived data. Emphasis will also continue to be given to the establishment of new and the improvement of existing basic data series for incorporation into national accounts estimates.

7. For some countries, statistics on commodity products, energy and national accounts, will however, still lag behind and essential price data for the evaluation of economic conditions, the measurement of production trends and the assessment of information will be far from complete.

8. Almost all African countries will have established decennial population census programmes and many will be actively developing or strengthening programmes of continuing household surveys as well as initiating experimental programmes for the improvement of their civil registration and vital statistics systems. Review of national practices in demographic and socio-economic data collection, processing, analysis and application will have been carried out, recommendations made and programmes for filling data gaps will be in progress in a number of African countries. A number of countries in the region will have embarked on collecting environment statistics as part of their regular statistical activities, but conceptual, institutional and technical capabilities will need to be developed much further in order to supply adequate environmental information to planners.

9. The regional statistical data base will have been computerized and further developed. It will have been expanded to contain data on environment statistics, with particular emphasis on drought and desertification and on natural resources. However, the full development of this data base which has in the past been hampered by the financial crisis of the United Nations will depend on available resources and on the quantity and quality of data originating from national and subregional supporting centres. It is their growth which will therefore largely determine the scope and adequacy of the data base at the regional level.

10. The 15 statistical training centres participating in the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA), will have trained approximately 700 professional and middle level statisticians a year. Some 20 trainers involved in middle-level/in-service training programmes will have been trained through workshops. In spite of this, the demand for trained statistical personnel will not have been satisfied. Post-graduate training will need to be further strengthened and research activities at the centres improved.

11. Studies will have been undertaken and recommendations made on national statistical data processing capability, statistical data base development and the use of software packages in statistical computing. However, these recommendations will not have been fully implemented. Countries will have acquired more micro-computers resulting in faster processing time, bigger storage capacity and lower costs. There will be an increased need to assist them in establishing national computer-based systems of integrated

economic, social, demographic and environment statistics and their analysis. A number of statistical publications on economic, social and demographic data collection, processing, analysis and application in African countries will have been prepared and disseminated.

12. These technical publications are intended to assist national governments in consolidating past achievements and thus ensure the durability of the data collection mechanisms which have been or are being established. Training activities (on-the-job training seminars, and workshops) and working groups aimed at developing conceptual and methodological skills of national statistical staff will have been organized. In order to further improve performance these efforts will, however, need to be intensified.

(ii) The period 1992-1997

13. The strategy to be adopted for the next medium-term plan is as follows:

(a) Assistance will be provided to member States for the maintenance and strengthening of their institutional framework and for the provision of data for integrated planning. Areas covered will include demographic, social and economic data, particularly on households and household members, as well as environment statistics;

(b) Advisory services will be provided to countries on the formulation of statistical plans including data production schedules, training programmes and detailed data processing requirements, on the establishment of user/producer committees for optimizing the use and relevance of statistical services, and on the development and maintenance of integrated computer-based systems of economic, social, demographic and environment statistics;

(c) Advisory services will also be provided on request to member States in the fields of population censuses, civil registration, household surveys, environment statistics, national accounts, trade statistics and industrial statistics. They will concentrate on building up self-reliance and will therefore emphasize on-the-job training;

(d) The existing regional statistical data base will be expanded with a view to disseminating to users comprehensive and up-to-date statistical information, including well-documented data from other international data banks and from national sources;

(e) A series of guidelines will be prepared, especially on the acquisition of computer facilities including micro-computers and their supporting software, on vertical and horizontal collaboration with respect to data processing among the different organizational units of the national statistical offices, on applications and analysis of data with particular relevance to the region and on the use of statistical information for monitoring the implementation of national development plans;

(f) Statistical computing materials for on-the-job training and formal training of statisticians at statistical training centres will be provided;

(g) Methodological studies will be carried out in specific areas of economic, social, demographic and environment statistics. These studies will have two main objectives, to identify and analyse the shortcomings of the basic statistics at the national level, and, to serve as technical guidelines for member States to assist them in their efforts to improve the quality and timeliness of data being collected;

(h) A series of seminars and training workshops will be conducted in order to examine conceptual and organizational requirements for improving national, subregional and regional programmes on socio-economic and environment statistics, to promote the exchange of experiences between the countries of the region in the field of statistics, and to develop further the professional competence of the participants. These workshops and seminars will focus on: statistical computing, population census, with particular reference to special population groups, civil registration systems and vital statistics collection, household surveys, environment statistics, international trade statistics, business surveys, basic economic statistics and national accounts. A series of technical documents will be prepared on the above topics, in order to provide member States with statistical methodologies suited to their needs.